

Hacking The Hiring Algorithm

What we're really talking about here is hacking the hiring algorithm. The goal is to position yourself in the best possible light for a potential employer. Now, coming from the recruiting side, I can tell you there's a fundamental problem with resumes. And while there are also problems with how job ads are posted, that's a topic for another day. Most people think of a resume as a comprehensive showcase of their background, skills, and accomplishments, presenting themselves as a well-rounded individual with strong connections and career progress. But that's not the reality.

The truth is, resumes are more often used to rule candidates out than to include them in. I know that might sting, especially after you've spent agonizing hours crafting the perfect resume, but from a recruiter's standpoint, it's essential to understand this.

Let's break it down. Imagine you're applying to a position with a company like Apple—let's say it's for a Vice President of Marketing role. The Vice President knows exactly what they want in a candidate, but here's where the problem starts. They submit that ideal candidate profile to HR, but HR may not fully understand the nuances of the role. HR pulls up a boilerplate job description that only partially matches the VP's expectations, and then that description is posted online for applicants.

Now, you're sitting at home with your well-crafted resume, assuming it's the perfect match for the job posting. But if you compare your resume side by side with the job description, you're probably only about 70% aligned, even if you're qualified. This disconnect between what the hiring manager wants and what HR posts is where many great candidates lose out.

Here's the key: your resume isn't evaluated by the hiring manager first—it's screened by HR or an Applicant Tracking System (ATS). These systems are designed to eliminate candidates who don't meet certain criteria. They compare your resume to the job description, line by line, skill by skill, often using an algorithm to score your resume and decide if you're a match. And let me tell you—over 90% of resumes get filtered out at this stage. They don't make it because they're not framed in the exact language the ATS or HR is looking for.

So how do you overcome this? Your resume needs to be tailored to match the job description exactly—using their language, their terms, and their priorities. If they ask for expertise in Canva but you're skilled in Photoshop, which is far more advanced, don't assume they'll understand that. List Canva—you can learn it quickly if needed, but HR needs to see the exact term they're looking for.

Now, let's get more specific. Your resume is a marketing document. It's not an autobiography or a detailed history of everything you've ever done. It's a tool to get you in the door, to start a conversation, to get an interview. And here's the harsh truth: there are things on your resume that are important to you, but no one else cares about them. Leave them off. Simplify or remove details that don't directly support the job you're applying for.

Tailoring your resume for each job is critical. It's radical, but it works. Think of it like this: you wouldn't use the same pitch deck for every client if you're in sales. You customize it to show how you solve *their* problem. Your resume should do the same thing—it should look like it was created specifically for that role.

This is the era we're living in. It's not your parents' job market anymore. You can't just skim through the classifieds and respond to a two-line job posting. Today's job descriptions are filled with everything from company culture to diversity statements, and while that's great for branding, it often makes it harder to understand what the job *really* requires.

Cut through the BS just like they're cutting through yours.

Now, let's address something important: I'm not telling you to lie on your resume. But I am telling you to bump up against that line. If you're confident that you can back up everything on your resume in an interview, then you're on solid ground. Use the exact words, the exact skills, and the exact tone the job description asks for. Remember, the goal is to get the interview.

When do companies verify your background? Usually, after they've already decided to hire you. So, the verification process often happens after they've extended an offer, sometimes even after you've started the job. As long as you can back up your claims and don't fabricate anything major—like a degree or experience with a company you never had—you're probably in good shape.

The bottom line is this: your resume is not about you. It's about how well you fit into the company's needs and their pre-written job description. Think like a marketer: you're not selling a product, you're selling yourself as the *solution* to their problem. You're not trying to tell them everything about you, you're trying to tell them just enough to get in the door.

I hope this has helped shift your perspective on resumes. Hacking the hiring algorithm isn't about being dishonest; it's about being strategic. Customize, align, and market yourself with precision. That's how you beat the bias and land the interview.

Key Suggestions:

1. **Emphasize that the resume is a marketing document:** You're selling yourself as the solution, not just listing qualifications.
2. **Clarify that resumes are used to rule candidates out, not in:** This highlights the need for strategy and customization.
3. **Stress the importance of using exact language from the job description:** Match the ATS and HR criteria precisely.
4. **Reinforce that not everything needs to be on your resume:** It's about what's relevant to the job, not your life story.
5. **Encourage tailoring each resume to look like it's made for that specific job:** It should fit like a glove.
6. **Balance the line between marketing and honesty:** No lies, but smart positioning is key.